THE MALANKARA SABHA

ENGLISH QUARTERLY

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 2 APRIL-JUNE 2025

ONLINE EDITION

The Malankara Sabha Magazine
Catholicate Aramana,
Devalokam, Kottayam - 686004
Ph: 0481-2573234

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His Holiness Writes...

Beloved in Christ,

The Feast of the Resurrection, commonly known as Easter, stands at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is the day on which believers celebrate the triumph of Jesus Christ over death, affirming the victory of life over death and of light over darkness. The Resurrection is not merely an event of the past; it is the foundation of Christian hope, the source of unshakable joy, and the ultimate proof of God's redemptive love for humanity.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to Christian theology and is well-documented in the Holy Scriptures. The Apostle Paul affirms its importance, saying, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). The Gospels recount that, on the third day after His crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead, just as He had foretold: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:7). This event is the culmination of God's divine plan of salvation, fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament.

The Resurrection signifies the ultimate victory of life over death. Christ, who willingly endured the agony of the Cross, emerged victorious over sin and the grave, offering all believers the promise of eternal life. St. John Chrysostom, in his famous Paschal Homily, proclaims, "Let no one fear death, for the death of our Savior has set us free. He has destroyed it by enduring it." Christ's Resurrection assures us that death is not the end, but a passage to everlasting life in the presence of God.

Easter is also the celebration of light conquering darkness. The world, shrouded in the gloom of sin and despair, is illuminated by the divine radiance of the Risen Christ. As St. Augustine beautifully declares, "We are an Easter people and Halleluiah is our song." The Resurrection renews the hearts of the faithful, dispelling the shadows of fear and doubt and calling them to walk in the light of Christ's love.

The Church Fathers emphasized the transformative power of the Resurrection in their writings. St. Athanasius states, "The Resurrection is a fact better attested than any event recorded in any history." St. Gregory the Theologian affirms, "Yesterday I was crucified with Christ; today I am glorified with Him. Yesterday I died with Him; today I am made alive in Him." Their words echo the profound truth that the Resurrection is not just a historical event but an ongoing reality that continues to shape the lives of believers every day.

The message of Easter is not confined to one day of the year; it is a call to live as witnesses of the Risen Christ. Just as the first disciples, filled with the joy of the Resurrection, boldly proclaimed the Gospel, so too are Christians today called to be bearers of this Good News. The light of Christ, once kindled in our hearts, must shine forth in our actions, words, and love for others. There are many dead and in darkness entombed in the cemetery of poverty, drug addiction, rivalry, robbery and violence. We have to make them to be resurrected from those tombs to the normal life of peace, love, kindness and forgiveness—the marks of the Kingdom of God.

The Feast of the Resurrection is the most glorious and joyous celebration in the Christian calendar. It is the victory of life over death, of light over darkness, and of grace over sin. As we proclaim "Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!", let us embrace the power of Resurrection in our daily lives, carrying its message of hope, renewal and salvation to the ends of the earth. In the words of St. John Damascene: "Now everything is filled with light—heaven and earth and the underworld. Let all creation therefore celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, in which it is established."

Wishing you all blessed Feast of Resurrection.

Baselios Marthoma Mathews III

Editorial

A desperate mother, running out of options, handed over her son to the police after enduring prolonged violence and threats from him. Based on her complaint, her 26-year-old son who was a drug addict, was arrested by the police. This shocking and painful incident took place in Kerala recently. Almost every day, our media, is filled with reports of similar shocking and tragic incidents concerning drug addiction and consequent violence. Many families are going through this ordeal. This ever-growing menace is not only placing at risk even the lives of small children, but is also destroying the very fabric of life in families, schools and colleges; ultimately ruining not only this generation, but the future of this entire country.

Agents and traders of drugs offer 'kicks' and many 'heavenly' experiences like Satan who gave glorious promises to Adam and Eve. As the forbidden fruit was given free of cost in the story of Eden, drugs are initially offered freely. Drug users and agents deceive others by saying that it can increase human creativity, self-confidence, courage and various mesmeric experiences. Recently, when the police raided a college hostel, they saw that a room was used for the sale and use of drugs by the students with the name 'door to heaven'. Through this deceptively beautiful door of drugs many young people are falling into hell on earth itself. Even if it is consumed once out of curiosity, there begins fatal addiction. After it is used a couple of times, the consumers will be enslaved with an irresistible urge to use it in higher doses.

It is essential to understand various experiences of this hell caused by drug addiction. In addition to physical damages, drugs make a person lose the ability of rational decision-making and self- control, leading to violent criminal activities. Drugs promote suicidal tendencies, encourages behavioural changes causing broken relationship and sexual abuse. It causes decline of performance at work with consequent loss of employment, and adversely affects progress in education and all areas of life. Drugs maybe a new name for Satan who tries to destroy lives.

Government machineries alone are not enough to control this dangerous threat or end this growing menace. Let the officials constrain and obliterate the sources of the breeding ground of this hellish activity effectively and with determination. Along with that, families and educational institutions also have to play a decisive role to curb this hazard. It must be noted that during His way to the cross, when the persecuted Jesus saw weeping women following him, He told them, "Do not weep for me but weep for yourself and for your children."

If a youngster without learning driving, tries to drive a vehicle without anyone to guide him/her, the result will be tragic not only to the driver but to many others also. For becoming a driver, teacher, doctor, pilot or any good professional, a long and proper training is extremely important. A meaningful training for driving human life is more important than the training for a profession. Widespread reporting of tragic events associated with young drug addicts demand 'a more responsible parenting, teaching and loving atmosphere at each home and school.' A consistent and continuous effort to inculcate faith and values in our new generations is inevitable in the context of the escalation of drug abuse and violence today, because as Jesus says "wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction" (Mathew 7:13).

Lent, especially Easter, the climax of it, is a spring time of the renewal of our hope in the midst of hopelessness. Lent is to ensure our regaining of the joyous Paradise. The Risen Lord will be with us in our struggle against all kinds of dehumanising forces like that of drugs with added hope and vigour. May the Holy Spirit deepen our dedication as harbingers of the true joy and peace of the gospel.

Bijesh Philip Achen
Editor, Malankara Sabha English Quarterly

HOSPITALITY: PHILOXENIA VERSUS XENOPHOBIA

Fr. Dr. K. M. George

While living in a tent in a plain desert, Abraham received three travellers in his tent-house under the shade of an oak tree. They were total strangers to Abraham. His hospitality became legendary, and the incident narrated in Genesis 18, gave rise to interpretations of the doctrine of Trinity later in the Christian patristic era, and also to the celebrated icon of "Philoxenia" (=hospitality, literally 'love of strangers') by the Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev in the 14th century. The theme of hospitality found a place in the reflections of contemporary philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur as well as in the political ethics of modern nation states.

It is known to us from experience that in general, the poor are more hospitable than the rich. That means that the virtue of

hospitality does not necessarily depend on material resources that we possess. In the ancient monastic tradition, hospitality was a prime Christian virtue for the monks living in the desert with practically nothing to offer to the guests.

St Benedict (6th century) in the west, instructed in his Rules, to consider every guest as Christ himself. (Remember the ancient Indian dictum "Atithi devo bhavah" – let the guest be God). In Christ's self-offering through suffering and death out of love for us and for our salvation, we see the supreme example of divine hospitality. It is in the desert of the nothingness of self-emptying (kenosis) that God receives us strangers and aliens into the divine household and the banquet of the kingdom.

The anonymous woman who anointed Jesus at the house of Simon, the rich Pharisee (Matthew 26:6-13 and parallels), deeply understood and responded to it, by an unusual and 'extravagant' act of human hospitality. Jesus drew out the contrast between the hospitality of a nameless and even despised woman, at a very inhospitable time and place, and that of Simon, the rich host's superficial hospitality with hidden ulterior motives.

The woman was exemplifying the meaning of the overwhelming divine hospitality of the Son of Man who was about to die on the cross, by her own overwhelming, evocative, and 'crazy' gesture of love. Only Jesus recognized it and said that she did it for his burial. What a marvellous moment of mutual recognition between the divine and the human! In all likelihood, the nameless woman must have followed Jesus up to Calvary and beyond. Think of the "fragrance that filled the whole house" (John 12:3), and how, what the woman had done, is being told and retold across the ages, as integral to the Gospel in memory of her (Matthew 26:13).

It may be a bit difficult for us to understand the suffering and death of Christ as part of God's hospitality towards the created world. But Jesus himself tells us that "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Voluntary suffering for the sake of love for others is the ultimate in hospitality. When you take into your household people who are total strangers and passersby, people who are not related to you in any way, people who are in some dire need of help, you are making a silent commitment to ultimately lay down your life for them. Here hospitality is salvation in its rich meaning. To be hospitable means to be committed to save life.

The opposite of philoxenia or love of the stranger is "xenophobia", fear of the stranger. We are taught to hate the alien, to suspect the passersby and mistrust and fear anyone who comes towards us. The irony of the age is that our world is now being ruled by high security systems and alerts claiming to save our life. At ever-rising cost of resources and relationships we actually curtail human freedom and rights, natural camaraderie and fruitful human exchanges, in order to build devices of death in the name of safety and salvation. The long-term blessings and promises to humanity that true hospitality brings in, like in the case of Abraham and Sarah, are becoming more and more alien to us.

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God. And that is what we are!" (1 John3:1)

(Courtesy: *The Fast and the Feast,* ISPCK Delhi 2019)

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(Rev. Fr. Dr. K. M. George is the Former Principal of the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam, and the Director of Sopana Orthodox Academy, Kottayam.)

Veneration of the Cross

Dr. K. L. Matthew Vaidyan Cor- Episcopa

In the course of the lengthy Good Friday service, the believers make the following declaration "We kneel down and venerate the Cross, by which we obtained salvation of our souls." Why is the cross venerated? The veneration of the cross implies the crucifixion cross of all desires, the uprooting of self-love and an unconditional obedience to the will of God. It purifies our passions and sanctifies our Holistic personality. The believer experiences the illuminating and deifying grace of God.

When we venerate the cross, we "know Christ and the power of his resurrection and share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10). St. Paul further states, "we find glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6: 14). The cross of Christ is God's power for us" (I Corinthians 1:17). "The enmity is stopped and we are reconciled in the cross" (Ephesians 2:14).

We are not worshipping the cross but only venerating it. Veneration is distinct from idol worship because we are not worshipping the object. We are not making the material divine. When we give respect to the Holy Bible we are not divinising the components – Carbon, leather or paper. When we venerate the cross, we actually venerate the sacrifice of our Lord, through which we are saved.

As the Saviour of the world, Jesus sacrificed His life on the cross. Christ used the cross as a weapon of Salvation. Those who love Christ, love the cross. The sign and the ideal of

the cross were very dear to the Lord. (He who does not take the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" Matthew 10:38). "The end of the enemies of the cross is decay" (Philippians 3:18,19). The cross is a banner of peace, victory and reconciliation.

The word "sleebo" means the crucified one. So, when we venerate the sleebo, we are venerating the one who died on the cross. The cross always speaks to the world. Making the sign of the cross is a silent and meaningful prayer. It gives believers strength, courage and hope. Our words alone cannot fully express our gratitude towards God. Visible acts are necessary to receive God's grace. The divine act of Salvation was done through God's visible act, the incarnation of Christ. God became flesh. Matter was used for the redemption of mankind. Jesus himself has asked us to perform visible acts using visible material things to receive Gods inward grace- water, bread, wine, oil and so on.

For the faithful believer, the cross is a dynamic and constant presence of the divine. It is also a device for blessing. In the Eastern Christian spiritual tradition, we love, respect, venerate and adore the cross, considering it as an object of reminiscence. We use the Cross in the worship of the church for lively, active communication with Christ. The message of the Cross is that of love, sacrifice, unity, reconciliation, sharing, patience and self-less humanitarian services.

Symbols speak volumes. The icons or pictures of Saints and other artistic works remind us of the presence of God and communion with saints. The believers are strictly warned against tendencies of idolatry. The objects of reverence have mediatory functions. The Medium helps to experience the abstract. Our five senses also communicate in meaningful worship. In the Cross, the power of love is totally bound with humility. With his

self-emptying, Jesus abolished on the cross, pride and self-centredness.

The Eastern Christian tradition does not compartmentalize the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. The Cross and Resurrection go together. Resurrection is the glorious revelation of the mystery of the Cross. We should place the cross and the resurrection at the centre of our Christian life. The great Friday becomes the Good Friday because we experience the foretaste of Resurrection in the Cross. In the hymnology of the church, we proclaim the cross as life-giving and Christ's divine Glory. In the sacramental life of the church, we experience the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection through baptism, Christmas and the Eucharist.

The cross is not an ornament. It is not something to express our Ego and affluence. The cross attacks our life of convenience, comfort and extravaganza. The Eastern Christian tradition does not patronise the emotional articulations of cruelty in the process of crucifixion. The passion plays, and cinematic shows projecting the sufferings of Jesus, are not generally recommended by the Eastern churches. The special vows and offerings submitted in the structures of Cross Towers indicate the surrender, devotion and thanksgiving in the minds of the faithful believer. It must be utilised for the well-being of the poor and needy. It is not for the glory of men but for the glory of God.

The cross proclaims the Victory of Christ

who defeated death through His resurrection. The cross with its message of Salvation and Redemption gives us strength to defeat sin, corruptibility and death. We place the Cross at the central part of our worship. The cross continuously inspires us to fulfil our responsibilities in the transformation of the self and the whole Cosmos. The cross reminds us that our faith should lead us to actions. Sacrifice is the part of Resurrection. We are strengthened by the cross to resist structures of evil. The Cross enables us to inherit immortality and incorruptibility.

The atonement through the death of Christ cannot be explained perfectly through any human theory. The sinless Christ sacrificed His life for us. This is God's justice- it is the perfection of God's love. The Redemption through the cross is explained by St. Irenaeus in this way: the disobedience of the first Adam was atoned by the obedience of the second Adam who recapitulated all the generations before Christ in Him. St. Athanasius, in his treatise on 'The Incarnation of the Word' explains the incarnation and death on the Cross as the solution of a divine dilemma. Justice is denied if sin is not punished or allow man to be punished and let him be lost. This is the divine dilemma. God united justice and love in Himself and saved all through his suffering.

Death on the Cross is the sacrifice for salvation. Christian commitment is to fulfil this self-sacrifice on the cross. The church is the arena of sacrifice in the divine economy. The cross can be rightly called "the Invincible Trophy". The Cross transforms 'sorrows into bliss'. John 16:20 says "your sorrow shall be turned into bliss". The cross is the medal of honor for the beloved of Christ. The cross proclaims that suffering is the hammer in the hand of the sculptor which makes the statue even more beautiful. By the Cross, sorrows, grief, misfortunes, persecutions, diseases and adversities are transformed into eternal Joy.

Through the suffering on the Cross, Jesus cleansed our sins. The Cross is our shelter. It declares that Jesus is with us during our afflictions and reminds us that sufferings are bitter medicines with the blessed effects. There is a valuable patristic insight: "suffering is to the soul what fire is to the ore." The veneration of the Cross is relevant, meaningful and biblical.

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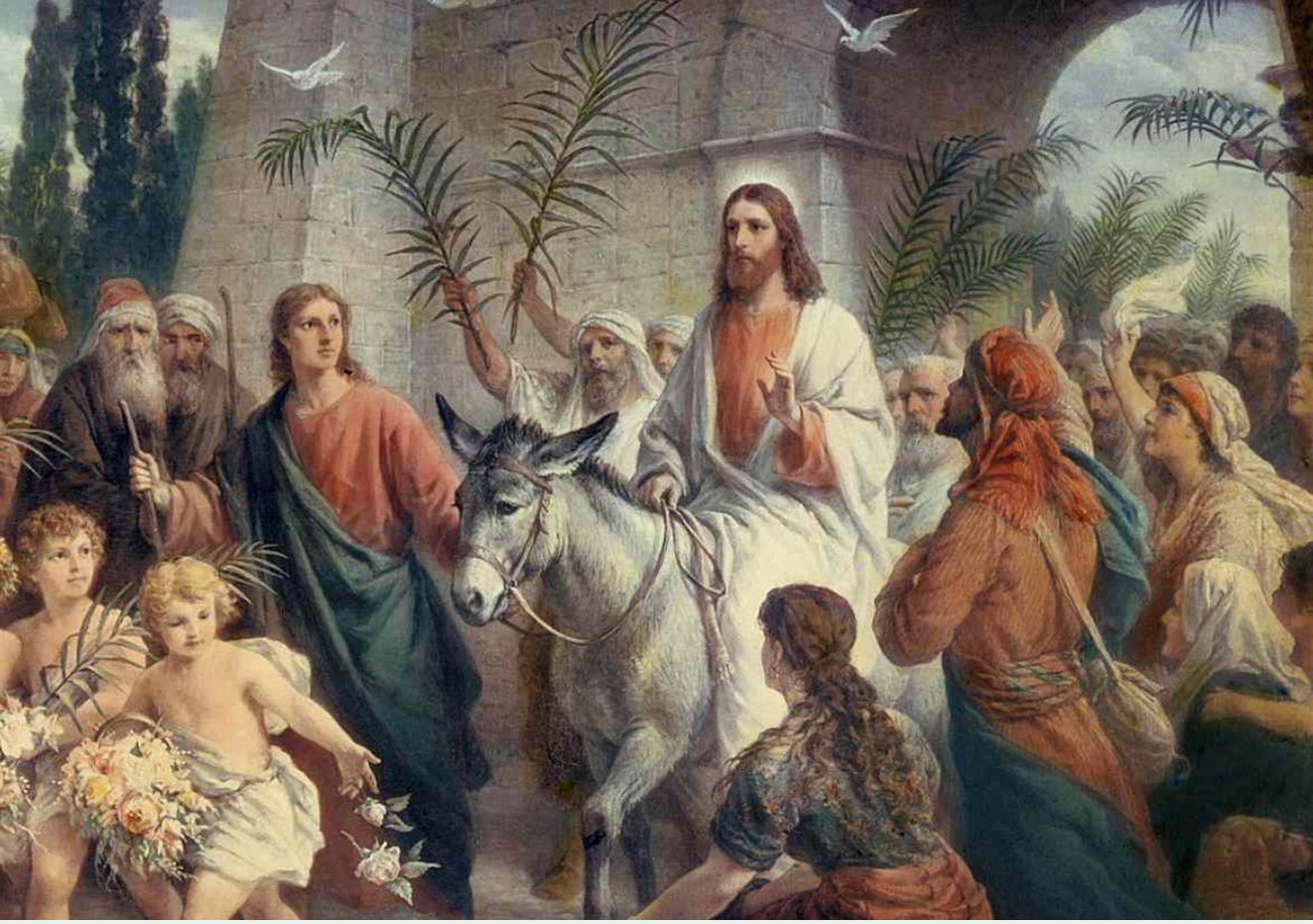
(The Very Rev. Dr. K. L. Mathew Vaidyan Cor Episcopa is the Principal of St. Paul's Mission Training Center and Director of Theobhavan Counseling Center, Mavelikara, Kerala.)



Jacob of Serugh on Sunday of Hosannas

Fr. Dr. Mathew Varghese

Jacob of Serugh (451–521), one of the most illustrious poets and theologians of the Syriac Church, stands second only to Ephrem the Syrian in his contributions to Syriac literature. A devout and magnificent poet of his time, he sang rhythmically of the mysteries of faith, fully meriting the titles bestowed upon him "The Flute of the Spirit" and "The Harp of the Church." In the Syriac liturgical tradition, no service is considered complete without the Boʻawotha of Mar Jacob.

A comprehensive study of the vast body of his work remains an immense undertaking, as the majority of his writings still exist only in manuscript form. According to the testimonies of Bar Hebraeus and Jacob of Edessa, he composed approximately 763 mēmrē (homilies). Many of these works still await scholarly exploration, though there has been a recent surge of interest in his literary legacy.

Mar Jacob delivered two homilies for the Sunday of Hosannas—one in prose and the other in verse. This homily, a sermon or discourse, was likely to have been delivered on a Palm Sunday in one of the churches in the diocese of Batnan, Edessa (modern Urfa in Turkey), where he served as a Cor-Episcopa. His

homilies are renowned for their poetic elegance, theological depth, spiritual wisdom, and moral exhortation.

The prose homily on the Sunday of Hosannas reflects on Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple (Mt. 21:1–13). It opens with an exhortation on the proper disposition one must have when approaching the sacred treasures hidden within the Scriptures. The Scriptures abound with the humility of the Son of the Most High, who descended and became the most despised and lowly of all. Therefore, when approaching them, the soul must be clothed in humility.

The significance of Palm Branches

Mar Jacob expounds on the symbolism of 'palm branches', which represent victory, peace, and salvation. The tender fronds of the palm also serve as a sign of innocence. He observes that the crowd waved them as a gesture of their acknowledgment of Jesus as the bestower of these divine gifts. (Jn. 12:13)

Hosanna

Mar Jacob explores the Hebrew meaning of "Hosanna," a term that signifies "Save us, we beseech thee" (Ps. 118:25). The cry of "Hosanna" expresses the crowd's plea for salvation and their recognition of the Messiah as their Saviour (Mt. 21:9). During the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, it is only in St. Matthew's Gospel that the people invoke the title "Son of David," whereas in Luke and John, "Hosanna" is directed to "the King." The crowd's proclamation of Jesus as the "Son of David" and Saviour underscores that their cries of "Hosanna" were an acknowledgment of his Lordship.

The Renewal of the Kingdom of the House of David

The homily primarily reflects on the renewal of the kingdom of the House of David and the purification of the order of divine worship and the Sanctuary. Christ, the King of kings, came to establish the incorruptible kingdom of David's House through humility. He entered Jerusalem, the royal city, yet the elders withheld from him the praise he was due, despite the prophetic proclamation of the Messianic King. In their place, the innocent children and humble disciples offered the honor and adoration befitting the King. In the verse homily, he chanted thus.

The priests and scribes shut up their mouths and did not give praise;

The band of children joined up to make joyful shouts with their Hosannas.

The Humility of the Lord of Heaven and Earth

In both the verse and prose homilies, Mar Jacob vividly recounts and extols the humility of our Lord while urging his listeners to discern the benevolence of the divine self-abasement and to recognize the Mighty One riding humbly on a donkey through the streets of Jerusalem. This recognition naturally awakens praise. Yet, humanity failed in offering due praise to its Lord.

From the place of the wheels and presence and wings of flames

Mercy carried you and behold a young one of a donkey carries you in solemn procession.

The entrance of Jesus marked a profound shift from the traditional royal procession of kings returning to their capital after triumphing over their enemies. This King rode upon a donkey rather than a golden chariot drawn by two horses. His hymnists were innocent infants instead of military troops. For this King, the trees offered their branches and the crowds their garments in place of royal carpets. While the kings of the world declare war and terror, the Mighty King proclaims peace and reconciliation.

Behold all regions solemnly escort you in their own manners,
the height with its light and the depth with the

Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

branches that are from its trees.

Above He is mighty, held in awe by the flame below (on the earth) He is humble, clothed with all poverty.

The Prophecy Fulfilled

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was the fulfillment of prophecy. According to Mar Jacob, Zechariah (Zech. 9:9) and Isaiah (Is. 51:9) sounded the alarm for Jerusalem, announcing the coming of the King seated upon a donkey. Yet, though the prophets sought to awaken the Hebrew bride, she remained unprepared to receive her heavenly bridegroom. Immersed in the deep slumber of idolatry, the mind of the adulterous woman was unshaken from its stupor.

The Cry of the Stones

Some of the Pharisees said to Him, "Tell them to be silent!" But He replied, "If these shall be silent, the stones will cry out." Here, our Lord neither exaggerated nor spoke against the Jews, but rather foretold what would come to pass on Friday. During His entry into Jerusalem, He did not permit Himself to be praised either by rational beings or by mute creation, for the chorus of children filled the place of all praises. In their midst stood not only a gathering of infants but also His disciples, who offered the King a homage befitting the grace of His humility.

On Great Friday, as the King of kings hung upon the Cross, the praisers fell silent, the disciples fled, and rational beings closed their mouths, failing to lift their voices in blessings and Hosannas. In response, mute nature itself sought to speak in their stead. When the children's voices were stilled, the stones cried out; when the Hosannas ceased, the cry of tombs and the rending of rocks resounded. And when no branches descended from the heights of the trees, the very rays of the sun were plucked from the firmament, for the sun could not continue its course while beholding its Lord stripped bare. (Mt. 27:46ff).

Thus, Mar Jacob affirmed that the prophecy of Palm Sunday was fulfilled on Friday at the Cross. Therefore, we must unceasingly offer our praise, lest the mute stones take up our sacred duty before God. Without ceasing, let us proclaim: "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

Conclusion

The greater part of both the homilies of Mar Jacob on Palm Sunday, is recited in the Prumion-Sedra and Bo'awotha during the service of the blessing of palm leaves on the Sunday of Hosanna. His spiritual expositions, mystical approach to Holy Scripture, and divine wisdom shine through these homilies. Mar Jacob's interpretative style imparts both spiritual beauty and a divine message to all, especially to those who seek the precious pearl of divinity from the vast ocean of Scripture.

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(Rev. Fr. Dr. Mathew Varghese is a faculty of Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam and Joint Secretary of St. Thomas Vaidika Sangham)

The Liturgical Calendar of The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: Tradition, Theology, And Contemporary Relevance - Part 2

Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios
Metropolitan

(This is the second part of HG Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios' article on the tradition, theology and contemporary relevance of the Liturgical Calendar of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. The first part was published in the previous edition, Jan-March 2025).

A brief recapitulation:

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, like many ancient Christian traditions, follows a rich and well-defined liturgical calendar that organizes the ecclesiastical year into seasons and feast days. It is rich in tradition and deeply rooted in the Syriac Orthodox heritage. It revolves around the life, teachings, and salvific work of Jesus Christ and is closely aligned with the events of the Church year, which include several feasts, fasts, and commemorations. This article highlights the importance of this tradition in shaping Orthodox Christian identity and its role in deepening the faith of believers. The first part of this article explained the gradual development of the liturgical calendar over the centuries, rooted in ecclesiastical tradition, historical events and theological reflection; and a detailed study of the seven seasons of the liturgical year. The second part deals with the role and significance of the Eight Tones or 'Nirams' (colours) and examines the importance and contemporary relevance of the Liturgical calendar.

The Role and Significance of Eight Tones (Nirams)

A distinctive feature of the Malankara Orthodox liturgical tradition is its use of eight tones or nirams. Each tone is associated with specific days and seasons, carrying a particular emotional and theological significance. The eight tones are not just musical variations; they are spiritual tools that help the faithful internalize the messages of the liturgy. These melodies serve as a framework for chanting hymns and prayers, each corresponding to a specific day of the week or liturgical season. The eight tones help to convey the spiritual mood of the service, reinforcing the theological themes being celebrated. Each of these tones is employed at specific points during the Church's liturgical cycle. The use of these melodies helps

the faithful not only to engage more deeply with the worship experience but also to express the full range of human emotions in relation to God's salvific acts.

These Tones or 'Nirams' are far more than an elaborate tradition- they are a musical theology that guides the faithful through the Church's spiritual journey. By engaging the heart, mind, and soul, they enrich worship, helping believers experience the mysteries of God more fully. Understanding their meaning and context can transform these tones from mere melodies into powerful tools for spiritual growth, creating a living and vibrant connection to the faith's deepest truths. Far from being 'too much,' the eight tones lead us in a harmonious journey, offering a spiritual symphony that resonates across the centuries, drawing the faithful closer to God. The liturgical use of the tones reinforces the cyclical and theological journey of the Christian faith.

Relevance of the Liturgical Calendar Today

In a world dominated by secular rhythms, the liturgical calendar offers a countercultural alternative. It provides a sacred structure that prioritizes spiritual growth and community life over individualism and materialism. For young people, the calendar can be a tool for spiritual formation, teaching them the importance of discipline, reflection, and celebration in their faith journey. Moreover, the calendar fosters a sense of unity within the Church. By observing the same feasts and fasts, believers across the world are united in worship, creating a profound sense of belonging and shared purpose. To make the calendar more accessible to modern believers, the Church can leverage digital tools, interactive workshops, and youth-oriented programs. Educating parishioners about the theological and spiritual significance of the calendar can foster deeper engagement. For instance, digital platforms can provide daily reflections, seasonal prayers, and resources that explain the meaning of feasts and fasts.

The liturgical calendar is not an archaic relic but a living tradition with profound potential for spiritual nourishment at all times. It should be taught as a transformational journey, not just as a series of traditional rituals. When youth understand the significance and meaning of fasts, feasts, and commemorations, they are more likely to embrace and benefit from them. The calendar can inspire the youth and the Church to engage the world, for example, feast days could become occasions for charity and community service. Instead of being confined to the church building, the liturgical life becomes a tool for living out faith in everyday life.

The liturgical calendar offers timeless wisdom, emphasizing rhythms of repentance, renewal, joy, and hope. It reminds the youth and the Church that spirituality is not a one-time event but a lifelong journey. It provides a framework for intentional living in a distracted world, helping individuals and communities grow in Christ's likeness. The challenge lies in bridging the ancient and the contemporary. With creativity and pastoral effort, the liturgical calendar can be a modern spiritual resource, fostering faith that is deeply rooted yet vibrantly relevant.

Can a Church Thrive without a Liturgical Calendar?

Some Christian traditions, such as certain Protestant denominations, operate without a formal liturgical calendar, relying instead on a more general observance of major events like Christmas and Easter. While these traditions thrive in their own ways, this approach often lacks the depth, theological richness, and continuity offered by the Orthodox calendar. The Malankara Orthodox Church, as part of the Eastern Christian tradition, emphasizes the holistic integration of time, worship, and spirituality. Moving away from its liturgical

calendar would mark a dramatic shift in its ethos and might result in traditional discontent.

Let's comprehend:

1. The liturgical calendar is not just a timetable,

a. but offers a cyclical rhythm of fasting, feasting, and reflection, which is essential for spiritual renewal, and

b. is a theological framework centred on the life, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ.

2. Without it the church might lose:

a. the structured spiritual discipline that helps believers grow in their faith and understanding of God's plan.

b. its distinctiveness as part of the broader Orthodox communion, leading to confusion about its theological and liturgical stance.

3. Without the calendar's rich liturgical and theological structure, there is a risk of faith becoming generic and less rooted in the mysteries of salvation.

4.Moving to a generic or secular calendar could dilute the Church's focus on Christ's salvific work, which is the foundation of Orthodox spirituality.

Why the Liturgical Calendar Matters

The liturgical calendar is one of the cornerstones of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church's spiritual and communal life. Far from being a mere timetable of feasts and fasts, it is a sacred framework that integrates theology, worship, and daily living into a harmonious whole. Its enduring relevance lies in its ability to guide the faithful through the mysteries of Christ's life, the history of salvation, and the practical expressions of faith.

1. Christ-Centred Living:

The calendar places the life of Christ, His teachings, and His salvific work at the centre of the believer's life. By aligning daily practices with liturgical seasons, it fosters a continuous awareness of God's presence and purpose.

2. Spiritual Formation:

Through structured periods of fasting, feasting, and reflection, the calendar shapes the spiritual discipline of the faithful. It offers opportunities for repentance, renewal, and celebration, ensuring a balanced spiritual journey.

3. Theological Depth:

The calendar encapsulates the Church's theology, connecting believers to the mysteries of Christ, the Holy Trinity, and the communion of saints. It deepens understanding by linking doctrine with lived experience.

4. Communal Identity:

The calendar unites the Church across time and space, synchronizing worship and creating a shared rhythm of prayer and celebration. It strengthens bonds within the community and reinforces a sense of belonging to the universal Church.

5. Engaging Modern Life:

The calendar remains relevant by providing structure and meaning in a fast-paced, often chaotic world. It helps believers sanctify time, offering moments to pause and reflect amidst daily life.

6. A Bridge between Heaven and Earth:

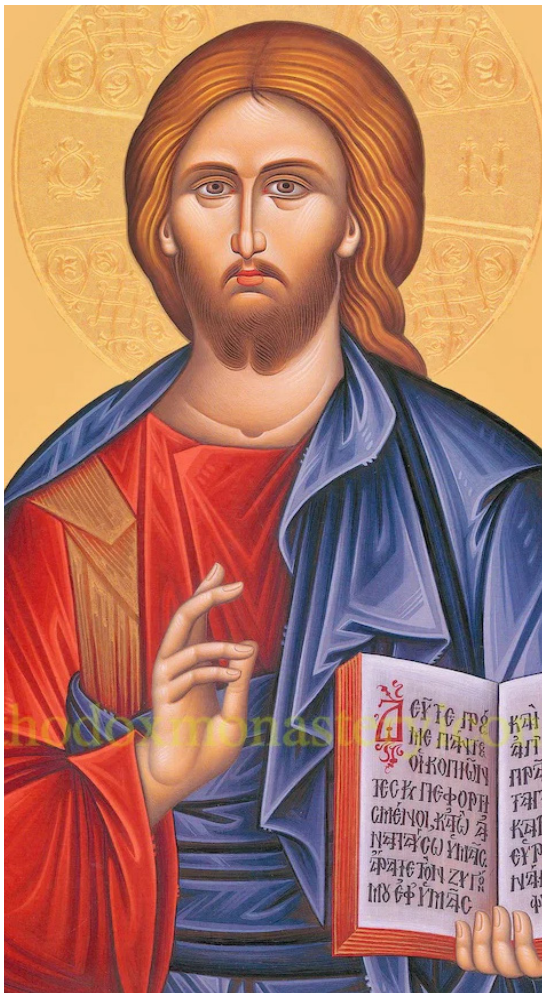
By marking sacred time, the calendar lifts the faithful beyond the mundane, inviting them into a participation in divine eternity.

7. Guiding Worship:

The calendar organizes liturgical services, assigning specific prayers, hymns, and readings to each season, feast, or fast. It ensures that worship reflects the spiritual mood and message appropriate to the occasion.

8. Fostering Holistic Devotion:

Through its cycles, the calendar



integrates prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and celebration, encouraging a well-rounded spiritual life. It helps believers focus on different aspects of faith, from repentance in Lent to joy during Easter.

9. Educating the Faithful:

It serves as a catechetical tool, through its observances. Celebrating feasts and saints' days connects the faithful with their spiritual heritage and inspires imitation of holy lives.

Conclusion

The liturgical calendar is not just a relic of the past but a living tradition that continues to nourish the Church spiritually and communally. It embodies the timeless wisdom of the Church, offering guidance for faith in a way that is both universal and deeply personal. The liturgical calendar is more than a schedule of feasts and fasts, it is a spiritual journey that guides believers through the mysteries of faith. By marking time with sacred rhythms, the Church ensures that its faithful remain anchored in the life of Christ and the teachings of the Gospel. In a rapidly changing world, the calendar stands as a timeless testament to the enduring power of faith and tradition.

By embracing the calendar, the Church sustains its rich theological heritage. It ensures that every moment of life, ordinary or extraordinary, is an opportunity to encounter the divine, making it an indispensable element of Orthodox Christian identity and spirituality.

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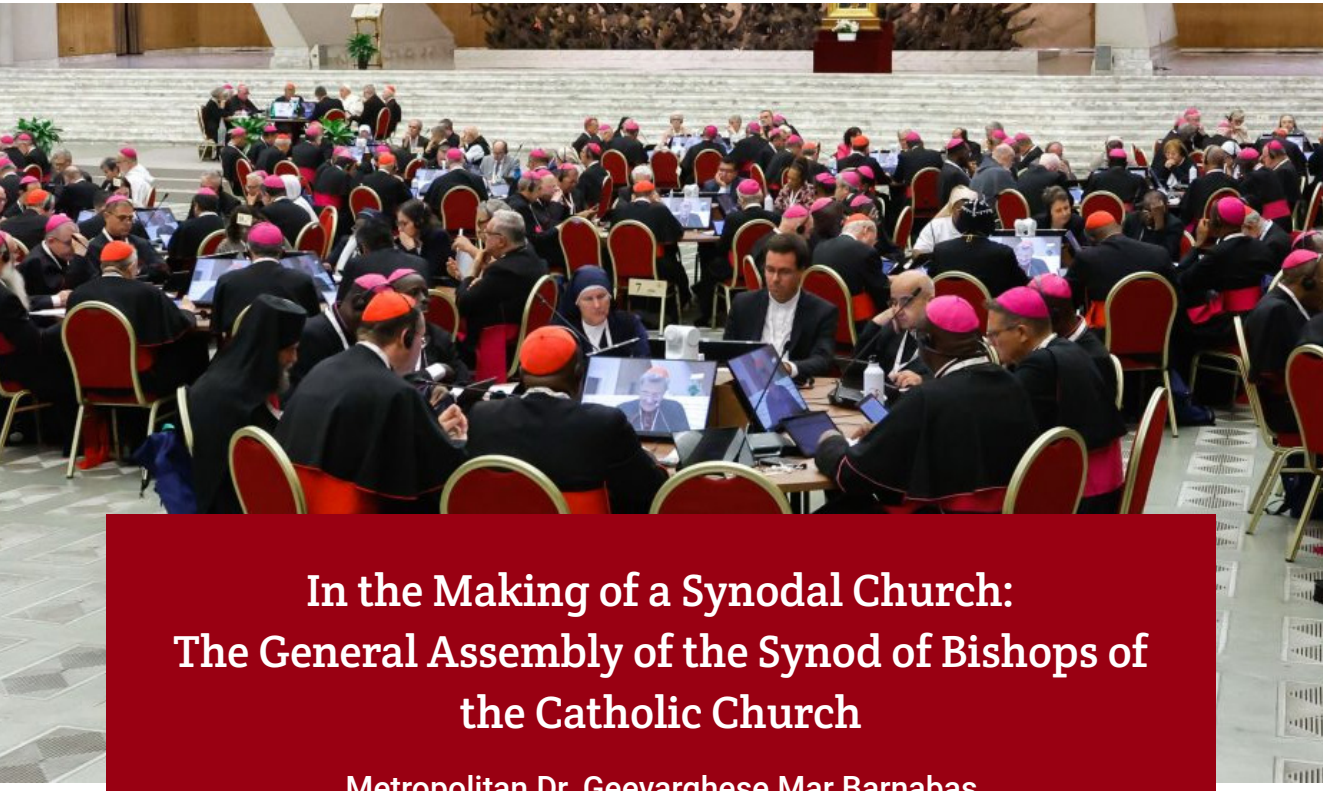
(H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Yulios is the Metropolitan of the Kunnamkulam Diocese. He is also the President of the NCCI and OCYM.)



In the Making of a Synodal Church: The General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church

Metropolitan Dr. Geevarghese Mar Barnabas

The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church was conducted in Vatican, Rome in two sessions in 2023 and 2024. 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission' was the main theme of the Synod. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church was represented by this writer as a Fraternal Delegate in this Catholic Synod. The invitation to participate in this historic assembly is the result of the long ecumenical relationship between the two Churches. The procedure leading to the Synod was long and exemplary. This three-year process of listening and dialogue, officially launched in Rome on October 9 and 10, 2021, opened up room for everyone to contribute to the process of making the Church Synodal.

The Synod 2021-24 is based on the energy of the Second Vatican Council. The Synodal journey is indeed putting into practice what the Council taught about the Church as the Mystery and People of God. The ecumenical prayer led by Pope Francis at St. Peter's Square in September 2023 clearly reflected the nature of the Synodal Church. This writer read out a prayer in our mother tongue during this meeting. The retreat for 2023 session was held at Fraterna Domus Sacrofano where the participants lived for two days prior to the session in Paul VI Hall, Vatican. The two major retreat sessions in 2023 and 2024 were led by Dominican priest Rev. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe and Benedictine nun Rev. Maria Ignazia Angelini. It was a memorable spiritual experience. The second session of the Synod began with a Penitential Vigil led by Pope at the Altar of the Cathedral in St. Peter's Basilica. The church asked forgiveness for her sins and raised her intercession for the evils of the world, for the church knows that Synodality requires repentance and conversion.

The Road to 2024 Synod

Now let us see how the Instrumentum

Laboris (work book), which served as the basic document for the deliberations of session 2024, was prepared. The Pope, as the President of the Synod, at the end of an International consultation, entrusted the themes of the Synthesis Report which is the outcome of the first session of the Synod held in 2023, to Study Groups. The Study Groups, consisting of pastors and experts from all Continents, used a Synodal methodology. In agreement with the Directory for Legislative Texts, a Canonical Commission was established to work on innovations needed regarding ecclesial norms. The insights from the Symposium of the Bishop's Conferences of Africa and Madagascar were incorporated into the Synthesis Report in making the Instrumentum Laboris for 2024. This basic document of the session reflected the concerns of the people across the globe regarding the main theme of the Synod.

The composition of the Synodal Assembly, consisting of the Pope, the Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests, Sisters, Deacons, Brothers, lay leaders and representatives from other sections of the Church, was impressive. There were more than six hundred people in the assembly. The seating arrangement of delegates at round tables according to the five official languages, was prognostic to the theme of the Synod. The daily morning worship provided the spiritual energy to catch up with the work. The participants were also invited to lead the worship. The composition of the participants at each table was well structured. People from different continents and varying linguistic backgrounds, ordained and lay men and women, young and old, all felt as one family at the table. The working groups at each table acted according to the direction of the Relator General. The directions from the persons concerned, given from time to time to the working groups, helped us to work on the modules. The method of the 'Conversation in the Spirit,' a meditative reflection on the module, was very impressive. After much deliberation and reflection, the members enjoyed the freedom to express their own opinion about the module, which was recorded and further reflected upon by everyone at the table. The insights from the free interventions in the plenary sessions were also incorporated in the final draft of the outcome of the table discussions. Each member of the assembly with a voting right has a say on the final document draft of the two-year assembly. This is a unique privilege of the people of God in the decision-making process of the Church.

The methodology adopted in the Synodal process contributed to its success. The work divided into several modules with a thematic focus and name pertaining to a section of the Instrumentum Laboris, was a meaningful arrangement for the feasible deliberation at the table. The methodology followed at the table such as hearing from each one, deepening the thoughts, conversations in the Spirit, little pauses and silence, drafting the text etc. helped in developing the theme in the right direction. The presence of an expert theologian at each table was of immense help in guiding us to take the themes forward. After the official process of the Synod, the proposal was communicated to us. The participants were honored to have the freedom to vote for the synthesis reports of the Language Tables for further discussion. The free intervention of the participants during the plenary session was another feature highlighting the role of each participant in the Synodal process.

The Final Document of the Synod

The Final document of the Synod is an important and significant document that represents the culmination of the three-year synodal process initiated by Pope Francis in 2021, involving extensive consultations with the people of God at local, national, and continental

levels. This document was structured in five parts, namely: The Heart of Synodality; Together on Peter's Boat; Nets cast at the Word of the Risen One; An Abundant Catch; and Forming a People for Missionary Discipleship.

The first part titled 'The Heart of Synodality' begins with the description of the Easter morning (Jn 20:1-2). At the tomb, there are three disciples, Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Each of them is seeking the Lord in his or her own way. They help each other to recognize the Risen Lord and together they become witnesses to him. Their dependence on each other embodies the heart of Synodality. The document emphasizes the Church as the people of God. The identity of the people of God flows from Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist, the source of communion and unity continually nourishes the people of God on their journey towards the Kingdom. The people of God are on pilgrimage on the paths of history. The people of God proclaim and bear witness to the good news of Salvation. Thus, this part presents the shared understanding of Synodality - the theological principles that illuminate it, the spirituality that nourishes it and its prophetic orientation.

The second part 'Together on Peter's Boat' highlights the invitation of Simon Peter who said "I am going fishing" (Jn 21:3). His colleagues follow him. A similar invitation is given by his successor for a Synodal Church. A missionary Synodal church needs to renew both its missionary commitment and synodal relationship. The Synodal journey calls for a church with a greater capacity to nurture relationships – with the Lord, between men and women, in the family, in the local community, among social groups and religions, with the earth itself. The call to renewed relationships in the Lord flourishes in the different contexts in which the disciples lived and carry out the mission. In an age that is experiencing a global crisis of trust which breeds mistrust and suspicion, the church must be visibly able to bear witness to the possibility of trusting one another in the Lord.

The Synod reiterated that the Ministry of a Bishop is to integrate the gifts of the spirit in unity. A Bishop's task is to preside over a local church as a visible principle of unity within it and a bond of communion with all the churches. His ministry is carried out with the priests and deacons. Priests and deacons exercise their specific ministry further according to the charisms or spiritual gifts they receive. Instituted ministries are complemented by those not instituted by ritual but are exercised with stability and also mandated by the competent authority. The Synod felt the need of providing more opportunities to lay men and women to participate in all areas of church life.

The third part titled 'Nets cast at the Word of the Risen One' recounts the words of the Risen Lord to the disciples to cast their net to catch fish after their futile labour (Jn 21:5-6). In the Synod, it has been recognized that discernment for mission, the care for decision-making processes, the commitment to accountability and the evaluation of our decisions are 'nets' that today's church is called to cast in to the world. In order to promote relationship capable of sustaining and orienting the mission of the Church, exercising the evangelical wisdom that allowed the Apostolic community of Jerusalem to seal the result of the first Synodal event, should be prioritized (Acts 15:28). Listening to the word of God is the starting point and criterion for all ecclesial discernment. A Synodal church is based upon the existence, efficiency and effective vitality of the decision-making bodies upon their functioning in accordance with canonical provisions. Priority should be given to the composition of members in

decision-making bodies, so as to encourage greater involvement of women, young people, the marginalized and the poor. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the existing Canonical provisions for the Diocesan Synod in order to better reflect the missionary Synodal character of each local church.

The fourth part is titled 'An Abundant Catch.' It begins with the narration of the miraculous catch of fish in the presence of the risen Lord (Jn 21: 8-11). This event is seen as the Synodal church in action. It is founded on bonds of communion that unite us providing space for all peoples and for all cultures. For a number of reasons, our times are marked by a growth in population mobility. Some find it difficult to form connections in their new country. The inhabitants of destination countries also find the welcoming of newcomers challenging. Both categories experience the impact of encountering diverse geographical, cultural and linguistic origins. In such contexts, the Church is called to build intercultural communities that rebuild community life and strengthen relationships. The church needs to explore new approaches and new forms of pastoral care to meet the needs of changing socio-cultural and religious contexts.

The fifth part titled 'Forming a People of Missionary Disciples,' is based on the words of the Risen Lord who entrusted His disciples with His mission (Jn 20:21-22). Hence a missionary people come into being. For them, Synodality means adopting a renewed style in ecclesial relations, and new dynamics regarding participation. Formation in Synodality and the church's Synodal style will make people aware that the gifts received in Baptism should be put to use for the good of all. This part of the document accentuates the importance of Christian initiation in the formation of missionary disciples. There was also a marked insistence throughout the Synodal process upon the need for a common and shared formation in which men and women, laity, consecrated persons, ordained ministers and candidates for ordained ministry, participate together to collaborate. It is being suggested that despite the diversity of cultural contexts, Catholic-inspired formation centers are increasingly called upon to become frontiers for a church that is moving outwards in mission. Catholic schools and Universities play an important role in the dialogue between faith and culture and in providing moral education on values offering a formation oriented towards Christ.

The document concludes by entrusting the results of this Synod to the Virgin Mary, who bears the splendid title of Odigitria, she who shows and guides the way. Acknowledging the value of the synodal journey undertaken, Pope Francis accepted the Final Document of the synod in its entirety and initiated the process of its implementation through proper channels.

Ecumenical dialogues

One of the most significant fruits of the Synod 2021-24 has been the intensity of ecumenical zeal. The Synod welcomes the recent publication of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity - The Bishop of Rome: Privacy and Synodality in Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical Ut Unum Sint, which opens avenues for further study. Ecumenical dialogue is fundamental to developing an understanding of Synodality and the unity of the global church.

It was a wonderful experience to live together and deliberate with people from across the globe for two months, in a collective effort to equip the church to take up her mission more effectively by 'discerning the signs of the times'

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(H.G. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Barnabas is the Metropolitan of the Diocese of Sultan Bathery)

Building Blocks for Spiritual Enrichment: A Patristic Perspective for the 21st Century

Fr. Dr. Varghese M. Daniel

The modern world, shaped by rapid technological advancements, artificial intelligence, and digital communication, presents unprecedented challenges to spiritual enrichment. While humanity has developed faster and has more efficient means of interaction, paradoxically, deep and meaningful communication has diminished. 'Information overload' fosters distraction rather than contemplation, leading many away from interior spiritual growth. In an age dominated by automation and scientific breakthroughs, the theological reflections of Philoxenus of Mabbug provide a compelling framework for navigating the spiritual path. His emphasis on inner purity and detachment from worldly distractions serves as a crucial guide for the contemporary Christian seeking true spiritual fulfillment.

The Primacy of the Inner Life: Spiritual Farming

Philoxenus frequently employed agricultural metaphors to describe spiritual growth, emphasizing the necessity of cultivating one's soul through spiritual labor. In his discourse on spiritual life, he draws a parallel between the farmer's patience in sowing and waiting for the harvest and the believer's perseverance in spiritual formation. Christ's parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3–9) underscores this dynamic, highlighting the importance of preparing the heart as fertile ground for divine grace.

In a contemporary setting, where immediate gratification is sought and artificial

intelligence predicts agricultural cycles with precision, the patience required for spiritual farming is often neglected. The digital age fosters a culture of rapid results, yet true spiritual growth necessitates an intentional disengagement from constant digital noise to cultivate inner stillness. For Philoxenus, Christian life requires tilling the soul through prayer, fasting, and repentance so that it may yield the fruits of holiness.

The Necessity of Learning Before Teaching

Philoxenus underscores the necessity of acquiring spiritual wisdom before guiding others, aligning with the Apostle Paul's exhortation: "Study to show thyself approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2:15). The theologian insists that no one should teach before first undergoing spiritual purification, echoing St. Gregory the Theologian's assertion that one must be made wise before making others wise.

In an era where digital platforms enable self-proclaimed experts to amass influence without rigorous spiritual formation, Philoxenus' warning remains relevant. He critiques superficial knowledge that lacks transformative power, emphasizing instead an experiential grasp of divine truths. Many parents remain blind to the challenges their children face in navigating the complexities of the modern age. The lack of spiritual discipline within families has paved the way for serious consequences in their children's lives. He insists that theological instruction must arise from a purified heart, not merely an intellectual grasp of doctrine. Before engaging in spiritual teaching, one must internalize divine wisdom through prayer and spiritual struggle, ensuring that knowledge does not become an occasion for pride but a means of drawing closer to God.

The Struggle Against the Passions

Philoxenus asserts that the true battlefield of the Christian life is the soul's

struggle against the passions. While bodily lusts are evident, he highlights the subtler and more insidious passions like pride, avarice, and vainglory, as greater obstacles to spiritual growth. He echoes St. Isaac the Syrian's teaching that overcoming minor passions paves the way for conquering greater ones. In today's world, dominated by social media algorithms that cater to human desires and amplify self-indulgence, the struggle against the passions is intensified. Philoxenus warns against the subtle ways in which worldly distractions entangle the soul, and advocates for rigorous spiritual discipline as the path to true liberation. For him, the Christian must actively resist the forces that seek to manipulate desires, engaging in fasting, prayer, and self-examination to achieve mastery over the will.

Recognizing Spiritual Victory and Defeat

A discerning Christian, according to Philoxenus, must recognize the spiritual dynamics behind victories and defeats. Citing Ephesians 6:12, he emphasizes that struggles are not against mere worldly forces but against spiritual adversaries that seek to undermine the soul. He warns that an apparent victory such as overcoming one passion may be deceptive if another vice subtly replaces it. St. John Climacus' caution against premature confidence echoes this view. In contemporary society, where success is often measured by external achievements, Philoxenus calls for a

reorientation of values. True victory, he asserts, is not found in professional accomplishments or social influence but in the triumph of the soul over sin. A Christian must engage in constant vigilance, not measuring progress by worldly metrics but by growth in humility and divine grace.

Essential Spiritual Lessons and the Pursuit of Detachment

Philoxenus outlines essential spiritual disciplines: humility, obedience, fasting, overcoming passions, and the necessity of prayer and discernment. His teachings on detachment align with Christ's warning: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). He cautions against the enslavement to material possessions and urges believers to use the world rightly without being consumed by it. In the digital age, the challenge of detachment is more pressing than ever. Virtual realities, endless digital engagement, and consumer driven algorithms create a world where attachment to transient things is pervasive. Philoxenus calls for a radical reprioritization: technology must serve as a tool rather than a master, and the heart must remain fixed on divine realities rather than temporal distractions.

Spiritual Renewal and Healing in Christ

Philoxenus, echoing Christ's teaching in Luke 5:37, asserts that true renewal comes not from external reforms but from the interior transformation of the heart. Artificial intelligence may replicate human cognition, but it cannot facilitate true spiritual renewal, which is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul's call to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2) is central to Philoxenus' vision of spiritual progress. Renewal requires confession, repentance, and a life immersed in divine grace. Moreover, Philoxenus emphasizes the dual aspects of self-healing and mutual healing within the Church. He echoes St. Maximos the Confessor's teaching that those who heal their own souls become natural physicians for others. While modern self-help and therapeutic methods have their place, Philoxenus insists that ultimate healing is found in the sacramental life of the Church, where Christ, the true Physician, restores the soul.

Living in Christ: The Ultimate Goal

For Philoxenus, the culmination of spiritual life is union with Christ. Drawing from Galatians 2:20, he insists that true life begins when one no longer lives for oneself but is wholly immersed in Christ. St. Seraphim of Sarov later echoes this sentiment: "The acquisition of the Holy Spirit is the purpose of life." In an age dominated by self-promotion and curated digital identities, Philoxenus' call is revolutionary. Rather than seeking validation through social approval, the believer is called to relinquish the false self and embrace life in Christ. Only through total surrender to divine love can one attain true spiritual fulfillment.

Conclusion

Philoxenus of Mabbug provides a compelling theological framework for navigating spiritual life in the 21st century. His emphasis on inner purification remains strikingly relevant in an era of distraction and digital saturation. The wisdom of the Church Fathers offers a beacon of truth amid contemporary challenges, calling believers to transcend fleeting pleasures, while in pursuit of divine union. May we, inspired by his teachings, strive daily for holiness, so that we may one day hear Christ's words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

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(Rev. Fr. Dr. Varghese M. Daniel is Professor of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, New York and Vicar of St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Bronx, New York)

Beyond Pretensions towards an Authentic Christian Life

Fr. Jeo Joseph

Geevarghese Mar Ivanios, former Metropolitan of Kottayam, had embarked on a mission to restore the ancient beauty of Orthodox iconography in his diocese. Starting from his own monastery, he sought to replace familiar devotional images with icons, those "windows to heaven" that have long been central to Orthodox Christian worship. Yet, his vision faced a stubborn resistance, a reluctance that lingered even after his passing. The question remained: why couldn't this revered spiritual leader persuade his flock to embrace such a profound tradition?

The answer, it seemed, lay in the realm of emotion. People confessed they couldn't "connect" with icons as they did with conventional Christian portraits. The familiar, often sentimental, images evoked a sense of comfort and emotional resonance that the austere beauty of icons simply didn't replicate. This resistance highlights a fundamental tension: the difference between emotional attachment and genuine spiritual communion.

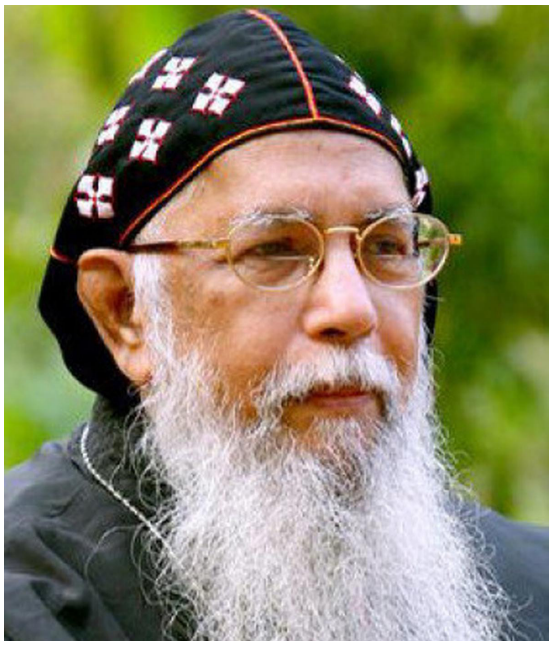
This disconnect mirrors the ongoing debate about the use of musical instruments in Orthodox liturgy. While music can stir the mind, the Church fathers cautioned against its potential to distract from the true essence of worship[1]: a quiet, contemplative communion with God, a spirit seeking His mercy.

The heart of the matter lies in the very nature of icons. The common feature of a still, unsmiling face of Christ, is not a sign of coldness, but a reflection of divine transcendence. It invites contemplation, not emotional fervor. This stands in stark contrast to the prevalent culture of manufactured smiles.

Living in India, especially during election season, one is bombarded with posters of smiling politicians, their faces radiating an artificial warmth, a manufactured virtue. The same tactic is employed by some religious leaders, whose beaming faces adorn flex posters and banners, designed to elicit emotional responses. Yet, these carefully crafted images often clash with the reality of their public persona, where genuine smiles and gracious expressions are conspicuously absent.

This raises a troubling question: have secular politicians learnt to manipulate emotions from religious leaders, or vice versa? Regardless, the lines have blurred. Both seem to have mastered the art of generating superficial emotional responses for personal gain.

The icon, in its silent dignity, offers a powerful counterpoint to this culture of manufactured smiles. It reminds us that true



spiritual depth is not found in outward displays of emotion but in the quiet contemplation of the divine. The resistance to icons, therefore, reveals a deeper societal flaw: a tendency to prioritize superficial emotional connection over genuine spiritual seeking.

This phenomenon extends beyond the realm of iconography. In our daily lives, those who are genuinely enlightened spiritually, are often criticized for their perceived lack of sociability. They are judged against the standards of worldly individuals, who prioritize people-pleasing over adherence to a God-centered life. These spiritual individuals, who are dedicated to their purpose, and to a Christian worldview that transcends fleeting social norms, become victims of comparison, their authenticity mistaken for aloofness.

In my own experience, I have encountered very few individuals who, in my conviction, embody this genuine spiritual enlightenment: Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Ivanios[2] and Priest Monk, Fr. George Philip[3]. Both were unconventional, not through contrived efforts to attract attention, but through a steadfast refusal to conform to societal expectations that would compromise their spiritual integrity. As Zacher aptly described his monastery, "we don't have television in our monastery and thus we don't know acting." This simple statement encapsulates the core of their authenticity: they refused to play a role, to perform for the approval of others.

Mar Ivanios's struggle to introduce icons, and the criticism faced by those who pursue genuine spiritual enlightenment, are deeply interconnected. They both highlight a societal tendency to prioritize superficial emotional connection and performance over the quiet, authentic pursuit of God. His legacy challenges us to look beyond the fleeting allure of manufactured emotions and to seek the true communion with God that transcends the superficial, a communion found in the silent contemplation of the divine.

Therefore, we must remember: it is not the mere stretching of facial muscles or the widening of lips that guarantee accountability before God. True spiritual growth demands a deeper introspection, a confrontation with the shallowness and hypocrisy that permeate our world. How can one, even in the nascent stages of spiritual awareness, readily smile or laugh when faced with the pervasive religious gimmicks and the hardening of hearts around them? When hatred is the new trend, when the advertisement of events eclipses the event itself, when charity becomes a mere record without regard for its true impact, and when the speaker on the pulpit is unrecognizable from the person he is off the pulpit, genuine joy becomes a rare and precious commodity. It is in this context that the silent icon, the unsmiling face of Christ, speaks with a profound and unsettling truth, reminding us that true spiritual depth is found not in outward displays of emotion, but in the quiet, unwavering pursuit of a God-

centered life.

While this article illuminates the significance of Christian icons, highlighting their truthfulness and transcendence beyond mere emotional resonance, its purpose extends beyond aesthetic appreciation. As we go through the Great Lent, commemorating the ultimate act of self-denial by the Son of God, we are called to a profound re-evaluation of our lives. This sacred season of the Great Lent is a crucial reminder to cease performing, to abandon the masks we wear. Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, did not come to please people but to fulfil the will of His Father. He loved humanity, but He was never a people-pleaser. To appease a fallen world would have required Him to descend to its fallen level and continued to be in that state, a no-no for the Son of God. Though He assumed fallen human faculties from St. Mary, who was subject to fall, He transcended these faculties by restoring and preserving an unobstructed communion with God.[4] He preferred to be like us in our ideal form, not in our erred form. As we are called to grow into the likeness of God, our lives should be dedicated to pleasing Him, even if it means confronting the errors and follies of those around us, mirroring God's own unwavering commitment to truth. This Lenten season, let us embrace the silent icon, the unsmiling face of Christ, as a call to authentic living, a life lived not for the fleeting approval of others, but for the eternal glory of God.

As we journey through this Great Lent, it is imperative to contemplate the profound emotions Christ endured due to our sins and the sins of our forefathers. Human history stands as a testament to the repeated failures of God's people to respond to His love appropriately, succumbing instead to selfish interests and pleasure-seeking tendencies. Throughout the Gospels, Christ vehemently condemns hypocrisy, be it charitable giving done for show, disfiguring faces to appear pious while fasting, honoring God with lips while the heart remains distant, or removing a speck from a brother's eye while ignoring the plank in one's own. These hypocrisies are rampant in our world today, demanding fervent prayer and vigilance to safeguard us from Satan's deceptions. When else, if not now, during this sacred season, is the right time to conquer Satan and reclaim our authenticity? This Lent, let us shift our focus from placing wreaths on bodies to praying for the departed, from merely advising to truly living, from reciting prayers to embodying them. Let our church attendance be driven by a desire to glorify God, not to fulfill social obligations. Let our worship be a means of purifying the heart , not a performance aimed at pleasing ears and garnering praise. The time is now, the Great Lent has arrived, let us refuse to play roles[5], relying on the resurrected Christ's mercy to live an authentic life, replicating the life of Jesus Christ.

End Notes:

[1] Prominent Church Fathers (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, Basil the Great) opposed musical instruments in worship, citing pagan associations and a preference for chanting, reflecting a desire to maintain purity in early Christian practice.

[2] Read: A Baselian Publication, The Life of Mar Ivanios, Kottayam, (2014).

[3] Read: a booklet, An Album of Holy Memories (published in English in Kottayam in 2023).

[4] Fr. Jossi Jacob (STOTS), citing St. Cyril Alexandria, asserts that Christ, while assuming fallen human faculties from St. Mary, transcended this fallen nature by maintaining unceasing communion with God, thereby opening the possibility to restore humanity to its ideal form by relying on Christ.

[5] Hypocrisy is the art of affecting qualities for the purpose of pretending to an undeserved virtue. Whereas on Christian grounds this so-called art is a sin of deception.

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(Rev. Fr. Jeo Joseph is a member of Mar Baselios Dayara, Njaliakuzhy, Kottayam)

Ethno-Phyletism and the Distortion of Divine Unity: A Plea for Ecclesial Metanoia

Alwin Printu Geevarghese

Ethno-phyletism a pernicious distortion of ecclesial ontology , represents a grievous subversion of the Church's universal vocation, sundering the mystical Body of Christ along the artificial boundaries of ethnonationalism . It emerges where national identity usurps the primacy of ecclesial belonging, thereby transmuting the Church from a transcendent communion into a vehicle for parochial self-assertion. In its most extreme manifestations, ethno-phyletism reduces the Church's soteriological mission to a mere adjunct of national ideology, eclipsing her divine universality with the contingencies of political allegiance. The Orthodox Church, with singular clarity, denounced this aberration at the Council of Constantinople in 1872, recognizing it as an existential threat to her catholicity. Yet despite this formal condemnation, the specter of ethno-phyletism continues to haunt contemporary ecclesial and geopolitical realities, fragmenting the seamless garment of Christ. Against such divisive tendencies, the high-priestly supplication of Christ reverberates with inexorable urgency: "That they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You" (John 17:21).

The patristic corpus, in its inexhaustible profundity, consistently repudiates all fissiparous tendencies within the Church, asserting instead the radical unity of the Body of Christ. St. John Chrysostom, that most golden-mouthed of ecclesiastical orators, exhorted the faithful to perceive the Church not as a microcosm of human fragmentation but as an icon of divine reconciliation. He declared with unwavering conviction that the Christian vocation breaks down the barriers of race and status, thereby rendering all worldly demarcations null in the economy of salvation. This teaching finds its most luminous articulation in the Pauline proclamation: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). These words do not merely represent an ethical exhortation; they constitute an ontological affirmation of the Church's nature as the eschatological community in which all particularities are subsumed within the boundless plenitude of divine love.

The Orthodox tradition, in its profound theological depth, underscores the Church's catholicity as an antithesis to all forms of ethno-religious exclusivism. The eminent theologian Fr. Georges Florovsky, in his penetrating analysis of Orthodox ecclesiology, characterized the Church as a divine, living organism, the very essence of which is unity, and which, in its being, is the sign of the reconciliation of mankind. The Church, in her most fundamental ontology, exists as the sacramental anticipation of the eschaton, wherein ethnic and national distinctions are rendered subordinate to the transcendent reality of communion with the Triune God. Nowhere is this reality more palpably manifested than in the Eucharist, where all partake of the same Body and Blood of Christ, obliterating all sectarian demarcations and affirming the radical catholicity of the Church.

Yet despite this theological foundation, the corrosive influence of ethno-phyletism persists, engendering ecclesiastical ruptures that undermine the very integrity of the Church's witness. The modern political order, shaped by the centrifugal forces of nationalism and ethnopolitical self-assertion, exerts formidable pressure upon ecclesiastical institutions, compelling them to align with national imperatives. This lamentable subjugation of the spiritual to the political is nowhere more evident than in the schism precipitated by the 2018 Ukrainian ecclesiastical crisis, wherein the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate found themselves locked in an acrimonious contest over autocephaly. The fragmentation wrought by this conflict is but a contemporary iteration of a perennial malaise, wherein the imperatives of national sovereignty are placed in dialectical opposition to the Church's universal mission. The words of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew—the Church is not a political instrument—stand as an unequivocal repudiation of the ideological subordination of ecclesiology to geopolitics.

The Fathers of the Church, in their perspicacious wisdom, foresaw and anathematized such schismatic proclivities, recognizing that unity is not an optional ecclesial ideal but an ontological necessity. St. Cyprian of Carthage, in his seminal treatise De Unitate Ecclesiae, articulated this reality with categorical clarity: "He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his Mother". This vision of the Church as the inexhaustible font of unity and reconciliation stands in stark opposition to the ethnically fragmented ecclesial landscape engendered by ethno-phyletism. St. Augustine, that indefatigable champion of ecclesial unity, further reinforced this truth, declaring with unambiguous authority: "The Church is one, and no division can sever her unity. These pronouncements are not mere rhetorical flourishes but theological imperatives, rooted in the very nature of Christ, who willed that His Body should be indivisible".

The ramifications of ethno-phyletism extend far beyond the confines of the Orthodox world, reverberating even within the ecclesiastical life of Kerala, where the St. Thomas Christians—an ancient and venerable Christian community—find themselves ensnared in divisions along theological, cultural, and even caste lines. The schisms that plague this community—manifest in the historical bifurcations between the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, and the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church—are not merely doctrinal in origin but are deeply embedded within the socio-political and colonial histories that have shaped Kerala's religious landscape. Here, as elsewhere, the call to unity remains paramount, for the Church in every place is called to be an icon of the indivisible Body of Christ. St. Paul's exhortation

to the Ephesians—Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3)—must resonate with renewed intensity in the hearts of all Christians, from the Balkans to the Malabar Coast.

The contemporary resurgence of nationalism and sectarianism, set against the backdrop of an increasingly fragmented global order, poses an existential challenge to the Church's integrity. Yet it is precisely in such times of division that the Church must stand as an unshakable beacon of unity and reconciliation. The example of Christ, who shattered the walls of hostility between Jew and Gentile, righteous and sinner, remains the model for the Church today. In this regard, the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Küng decried ethno-phyletism as a fundamental betrayal of the Church's universal mission, reducing her to a mere custodian of nationalistic fervor. Similarly, the distinguished Indian Orthodox theologian Paulose Mar Gregorios condemned nationalism within ecclesiastical structures as a disfigurement of the Church's cosmic vocation, wherein the eschatological vision of redeemed humanity is supplanted by the ephemeral constructs of political allegiance.

Ethno-phyletism, a pernicious distortion of ecclesial identity, is dismantled by both Eastern and Western thought, which affirm transcendence over parochialism. "Advaita Vedanta", as articulated by Shankaracharya, dissolves ethnic distinctions as "maya", an illusory construct that obscures ultimate reality, much like "Kenotic theology" calls for self-emptying in Christ, who annihilates divisive egoism through the Cross. Similarly, "Bhakti" theology, as expressed in Madhvacharya's devotional framework, and Augustinian "caritas" subordinate human identity to the primacy of divine communion, where ethnic and national allegiances are rendered secondary to participation in God's love. The Buddhist doctrine of "anatta" (non-self) further negates nationalist self-attachment, exposing ethnic exclusivism as an illusory construct of the ego, a notion paralleled in Stoic "cosmopolitanism", where Marcus Aurelius envisions humanity as bound by universal reason rather than particularist loyalties. In the moral domain, Kant's categorical imperative rejects ethno-phyletism as an unethical privileging of the particular over the universal, mirroring Orthodox eschatology, which envisions all nations reconciled in the divine Logos, where human distinctions dissolve in the uncreated light of God's presence. Thus, across metaphysical, ethical, and theological dimensions, ethno-phyletism stands as an ontological aberration, refuted by the inexorable call to transcendence, self-emptying love, and divine unity.

The path toward unity demands nothing less than an uncompromising commitment to humility, repentance, and love. It necessitates the renunciation of parochial chauvinism, the embrace of the other, and the unwavering recognition that in every fellow Christian—regardless of national or ethnic identity—we behold the Imago Christi. This is the path of authentic reconciliation, the path that leads not only to ecclesiastical unity but to the peace that Christ promised—the peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7). As the Church confronts the perennial scourge of ethno-phyletism, she must ever hearken to the apostolic admonition: One Body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-5). For in Christ alone—He who is the Alpha and the Omega, the firstborn of all creation— do we find our true and everlasting unity.

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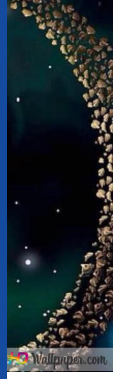
(Mr. Alwin Printu Geevarghese is Resident Junior Member, St. Stephen's College, Delhi; Former Senator, St. Stephen's Student's Union; Member, Prayatna (Delhi Diocesan Magazine) Editorial Board and Member, MGOCSM Delhi Diocesan Committee)

Science and Religion: The Origin of the Universe, Life, and Humanity

Dr. Susan Eapen



The discourse on the origins of the universe, life, and humanity has long captivated the minds of philosophers, scientists and theologians alike. At the intersection of science and religion lies a profound quest for understanding—each field seeking truth through differing methodologies. Science is characterized by its reliance on empirical evidence, the scientific method, and the pursuit of knowledge through observation and experimentation. It is dynamic, always evolving with new discoveries that challenge previous understandings. Religion, on the other hand, is often based on faith, scripture, and tradition, providing a more static and individualistic approach to existential questions. While science requires proof and repeatability, religion calls for belief and personal experience. Despite efforts to reconcile the two, in many cases the pursuit undertaken by each remains fundamentally separate.

Understanding Religious Demographics

Globally, religious affiliations are diverse, with Christianity being the largest, encompassing approximately 32% of the population—around 2.2 billion adherents. Islam follows at about 23% (1.6 billion), while Hinduism represents 15% (1 billion), Buddhism at 7% (500 million), and Judaism at 0.2% (14 million). Additionally, there are numerous other faith traditions, including Sikhism, Jainism, Bahai, Shintoism, and various tribal religions. Notably, 16% of the global population identifies as atheist, agnostic, or non-religious, reflecting the complex tapestry of beliefs regarding creation and existence.

Major Religious Perspectives on Creation

Christianity: Christianity asserts a monotheistic belief in a singular God who created the universe, as detailed in the biblical account of Genesis. The creation narrative unfolds in six days:

- Day 1: Creation of light
- Day 2: Formation of sky and water
- Day 3: Emergence of land and vegetation
- Day 4: Creation of the sun, moon, and stars
- Day 5: Creation of sea creatures and birds
- Day 6: Creation of land animals and humanity

This account emphasizes that God created the universe ex nihilo ("from nothing"), highlighting His omnipotence. Interpretations of the "days" of creation vary, with some Christian leaders suggesting these periods may span millions of years, aligning more closely with scientific understandings of geological time and evolution.

Islam: Islam shares similarities with Christianity concerning creation. Muslims believe that Allah (God) created the universe from nothingness, as described in the Quran. The concept of creation spans six days in Islamic teachings, similar to Christian narratives. Additionally, Islam places emphasis on Allah's

sovereignty and knowledge in bringing forth all existence, including angels and the cosmos before humans.

Hinduism: In contrast, Hinduism presents a cyclical view of creation and destruction. The universe undergoes repetitive cycles known as kalpas, overseen by the Trimurti—Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). The Brahmanda, the primordial cosmic egg, symbolizes the emergence of life and the universe, incorporating the five elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. The cyclical nature of time in Hinduism differs significantly from the linear progression seen in Christianity and Islam.

Buddhism: Buddhism is non-theistic and lacks a central creator figure or singular origin story. It emphasizes a cyclic universe, where realms evolve through birth, death, and rebirth. The universe has no fixed beginning, and its origins unfold through a complex interplay of forces, highlighting the inter-connectivity of all phenomena.

Judaism: Judaism shares the belief in one God, who revealed Himself to the Israelites through prophets. The core teachings include the Torah, the Talmud, the Ten Commandments and the coming of the Messiah. Rituals, prayers, and observance of commandments (mitzvot) are central to Jewish practice.

The Origin of the Universe According to Science

The origin of the universe is a captivating field in science that has fascinated philosophers and scientists from time immemorial. Researchers continue to explore this mystery using various observations, experiments, and theoretical work. Among the different theories regarding the universe's origin, the Big Bang Theory is the most prominent.

Big Bang Theory

The Big Bang Theory suggests that the universe began as an infinitely hot and dense point, known as a singularity, around 13.8 billion years ago. From this single point, space expanded. Evidence from cosmic microwave background radiation and the abundance of light elements supports this theory. The Big Bang produced hydrogen, helium and lithium, while heavier elements formed through nuclear fusion in stars. Large stars produced silicon and ejected it into space upon exploding.

The composition of the universe, including vast galactic clusters and super-clusters, is a result of the gravitational collapse of tiny fluctuations in the universe's density. After the Big Bang, the universe underwent rapid transformations. Initially, only hydrogen, helium, and lithium—the three lightest elements in the periodic table—were present. Gravitational accretion of material at the hot and dense centers of protoplanetary disks led to the formation of stars through hydrogen fusion.

Early stars were massive and short-lived, producing heavier elements through stellar nucleosynthesis, including iron. Heavier elements formed during supernovae at the end of a star's life cycle, with carbon mainly forming in white dwarf stars. When these stars reached the end of their life cycles, they ejected heavier elements such as carbon and oxygen, which contributed to the formation of rocky planets and other bodies. Key events included the breaking of symmetry, resulting in the formation of fundamental forces: gravity, electromagnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces. Over billions of years, the universe evolved and expanded.

Various events, such as the collapse of gas clouds, led to the formation of stars and galaxies. Gradually, galaxies collided and merged, forming larger galaxies, including our Milky Way. The formation of planetary systems began with the collapse of clouds of gas and dust. Material drawn to the center formed a star,

while remnants formed a disc around the star. Materials in the disc coalesced to form planets.

Solar System

Our Solar System formed alongside the Sun, as explained by the Nebular Hypothesis. This hypothesis states that a spinning cloud of dust, called a nebula, flattened into a protoplanetary disk, giving rise to the Solar System. The Solar System consists of the Sun, eight planets, five dwarf planets, nearly 200 moons and a host of smaller objects. The giant planets are composed of liquids and gases, with layers of hydrogen and helium, while the terrestrial planets primarily consist of rocks and metals.

Early Earth was heated by radioactive decay, collisions with space objects, and gravitational compression. This heating caused molten metal to sink to Earth's center, forming the core, while silicate melt floated to the surface, forming the mantle and crust. A collision with another planet ejected debris into orbit around Earth, which eventually coalesced to form the Moon. Earth's atmosphere resulted from volcanic degassing, contributions by comets and meteorites, and photosynthesis.

Dark Matter and Dark Energy

All the atoms and light in the universe together constitute less than 5% of its total content. The rest is composed of dark matter and dark energy. Dark matter is not simply dark, but invisible. It makes up most of the galaxies and galaxy clusters and is responsible for the organization of galaxies.The universe is constantly expanding. The mysterious energy that counteracts gravity and accelerates the universe's expansion is called dark energy. This term describes the unknown influence driving the accelerated expansion of the universe and pushing galaxies apart.

The Origin of Life: Scientific Theories

The origins of life remain one of science's greatest mysteries. Various hypotheses attempt to explain how life might have arisen from non-living matter.

1. Primordial Soup Hypothesis: Proposed by Stanley Miller and Harold Urey in 1953, this theory suggests that life originated from a "primordial soup" of organic molecules facilitated by energy sources such as lightning and UV radiation.

2. RNA World Hypothesis: This hypothesis posits that self-replicating RNA molecules were precursors to all current life forms, capable of both storing genetic information and catalysing chemical reactions.

3. Iron-Sulfur World Theory: Suggests that life could have originated on the surfaces of iron and nickel sulfide minerals in hydrothermal vents, where organic molecules may have formed and evolved.

Current scientific consensus views the emergence of life as a complex series of events rather than a single occurrence, emphasizing the role of environmental factors in facilitating the transition from non-living to living systems. Researchers identify three essential components for the origin of life: self-replication, metabolism, and cell membrane formation, noting the importance of early environmental conditions.

(To be continued)

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(Dr. Mrs. Susan Eapen is a globally reputed plant biology and botany scientist and one of the pioneers in transgenic plant research. Stanford University included her among 2% of the World's top-ranking scientists in the "Plant Biology and Botany" category. She retired as a Senior Scientist from Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Mumbai, and currently serves as an Adjunct Professor at UC College, Aluva. She has also served as the President of Indian Women Scientists' Association. Dr. Eapen belongs to St. Thomas Orthodox Church, UC College, Alwaye.)

NEWS

The Holy Episcopal Synod against the Drug Menace

Realising the alarming truth that the drug mafia has deeply infiltrated among the youngsters in Kerala, the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Church called upon the Civil Society of Kerala to be constantly alert and vigilant against drug abuse and drug trafficking. The news about young drug addicts ruthlessly murdering their kith and kin, are not isolated instances now. Behind several cases reported by the police, the influence of narcotics is evident. The Synod expressed grave concern regarding the octopus grip of intoxicants which cannot be tackled adequately by the government and police- excise authorities.

The Holy Synod observed that the consumption of alcohol is also equally widespread and serious. Drinking gives rise to severe health issues. Instead of restricting alcoholic drinks, if more liquor manufacturing breweries are sanctioned, it will be tantamount to nourishing the drug mafia with milk.

The government must initiate elaborate projects to keep our youngsters away from drugs and drinks. The school level programs should not end with just anti-drug pledges. The Church promised to fully support all efforts to spread awareness among school children against this grave disaster. The Synod noted that films which promote the use of intoxicants are greatly influencing children and therefore requested the artists and technicians to stay away from such films and join hands in all efforts to safeguard our younger generation from the snares of intoxicants.

Decisions of the Holy Episcopal Synod

The Synod of the Malankara Orthodox Church which met in the last week of February 2025 stated that what is needed in Malankara is abiding peace, not parallel administration.

With the final verdict of the Honorable Supreme Court in 2017 the Malankara church dispute had reached the finishing point. The claims and arguments were heard and evaluated from the subordinate courts onwards and the Apex court had given its final judgement. The court categorically said that the Malankara church should be administered as per the 1934 constitution. The Supreme Court of the nation so tolled the death knell of parallel administration within the church.

Notwithstanding the court's directions, the re-establishment of peace in Malankara is regrettably getting delayed. The Holy Episcopal Synod examined this issue thoroughly in its recent sessions.

Most members of the Malankara church yearn for peace. Attempting to install a parallel administration again will spoil the prevailing peaceful mood. The Spiritual-temporal powers of the Malankara church are vested with the Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan. This being the truth, the efforts to consecrate parallel authorities are disappointing actions tantamount to contempt of court. The discord and strife should not be handed down to the next generations. The Holy Synod exhorted everyone to accept this reality. The Synod also underlined the need for other forums of the church to examine this issue with due importance.

Other decisions:

a) It was resolved to strengthen the ecumenical relations of the church. As part of this initiative, it was decided to visit the heads of other churches at national and international levels and also to respond collectively to issues affecting the community in general.

b) The Synod also discussed at length several issues related to various dioceses of the church.

c) It was suggested that 'Job Opportunity Centers' may be started by all Dioceses.

d) His Grace Geevarghese Mar Philoxenus, Metropolitan of Chennai Diocese, was appointed President of St. Dionysius Orthodox Fellowship, a spiritual organisation for church members aged 40 to 60.

Managing Committee objects to the attempts to Elevate a Substitute Catholicos

The Managing Committee of the Malankara Orthodox Church adopted a resolution objecting to the attempts made to sow seeds of discord and disrupt the peace in the Malankara Church, by elevating a substitute Catholicos by the Patriarch of Antioch. The resolution also expressed resentment against the government and political leaders supporting these actions. The resolution was presented by Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese, Priest Trustee, during the session, and supported by Shri. Ronny Varghese Abraham, Lay Trustee.

The significant points of the resolution are as follows:

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, established by the Holy Apostle St. Thomas in A.D. 52, has always stood in compliance with the Constitution and the legal systems of this country. The last word on those who tried to drag this church into legal battles was the Supreme Court ruling of July 3, 2017. The court categorically declared that the Malankara Church is a trust that has been and will continue to exist forever, and nothing can be separated or taken away from this trust. The court also affirmed that the Patriarch of Antioch had no authority to appoint even a single deacon in Malankara. Despite this, an attempt was made to elevate a substitute Catholicos in Lebanon on March 25, challenging the ruling of the highest court of the country.

The ancestors of the Malankara Church were believers who shattered the chains of foreign dominance through the 'cross of truth' in the struggle for independence. We carry the torch of this truth in our hearts, and affirm that the freedom and existence of this church will not be compromised in any circumstances. The Managing Committee recorded it's protest against the actions of those attempting to engage in parallel governance in Malankara and those who are complicit in such unconstitutional practices.

50-days 'Green Lent' focusing on Water Conservation launched

"Excessive consumption of water is a sin and water is a precious resource that should be used without waste," said His Grace Joseph Mar Dionysius, Chairperson of the Ecological Commission under the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. His Grace Mar Dionysius was speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the 'Green Lent' initiative that coincided with the 50-day Great Lent, a time before Easter in which Christians focus on simple living, prayer, and fasting in order to grow closer to God.

In a significant gesture, HG Mar Dionysius, solemnly poured water into a set of clay ceramic jars held by children, which highlighted the importance of water conservation, and emphasized the responsibility of handing over water resources to future generations. At the wedding in Canaan, Jesus had transformed water that was filled in clay ceramic pots into precious wine. The seven-week initiative is guided by seven Biblical reflections based on the key themes of Green Lent, namely, frugality including waste minimisation, ecological restoration, energy conservation and environment-friendly road transport.

Advocate Biju Oomen, Secretary, Malankara Sabha Association, presided over the inaugural ceremony that was held on March 2, at St. Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church in West Kallada, Kollam. HG Yuhanon Mar Thevodoros, Bishop of the Punalur Diocese, delivered the key-note address. HG Geevarghese Mar Pakomios, Bishop of the Malabar Diocese, Sabha Managing Committee Member Shri John C. Daniel, Vicar, Fr. Daniel George, Asst. Vicar, Fr. John Samuel, Fr. Shibu Koshy Isaac and Fr. Joykutty Varghese, spoke on the occasion.

St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sanghom Regional Refresher Courses 2025

Theme: The Orthodox Way in the Contemporary World

St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sanghom successfully completed the Regional Refresher Courses 2025, a spiritually enriching and theologically profound initiative that brought together clergy from various dioceses. These sessions served as an opportunity for reflection, renewal, and reaffirmation of their sacred calling in the contemporary world.

Through the active participation of the priests and the immense support of the diocesan bishops, this initiative became a transformative experience for all involved. It was a time for them to rekindle the Orthodox faith, engage in meaningful discussions, and strengthen their commitment to serve the Church and the faithful with renewed zeal.

The refresher courses were conducted at the following locations:

- South Zone –
January 21, 2025 (Tuesday) @ Kottarakkara
- Central Zone I –
February 4, 2025 (Tuesday) @ Parumala
- Central Zone II –
February 18, 2025 (Tuesday) @ Njaliyakuzhy
- North Zone –
March 4, 2025 (Tuesday) @ Mulakulam
- Malabar Zone –
March 18, 2025 (Tuesday) @ Kunnamkulam

Each of these gatherings became a vibrant platform for theological discourse, pastoral training, and spiritual rejuvenation,

These refresher courses encouraged the priests to move forward with renewed strength and a firm commitment to uphold the Orthodox faith in all its richness.

reminding the participants of their sacred responsibility as priests to lead, teach, and inspire in an ever-changing world.

The success and theological depth of these sessions were greatly enriched by the insightful guidance and wisdom of the esteemed key resource persons: HG Zachariah Mar Severios, Very Rev. Dr. Abraham Konat Reesh Cor Episcopa, Very Rev. Dr. M P George Cor Episcopa, Rev. Fr. Dr. Tenny Thomas, Rev. Fr. Dr. Sunny Chacko, Rev. Dr. Mothi Varkey and Dr. Tony Abraham.

Their thought-provoking sessions, rooted in Orthodox theology, pastoral care, and contemporary challenges, provided invaluable insights that strengthened and equipped the clergy for their spiritual and ministerial journey.

The success of these refresher courses would not have been possible without the unwavering commitment of the regional secretaries—Rev. Fr. Midhun, Rev. Fr. Leslie Cherian, Rev. Fr. Geevarghese Pathappillil, and Rev. Fr. T. C. Jacob—who worked tirelessly to ensure seamless coordination and meaningful engagement at every session. Their dedication and leadership played a crucial role in making these gatherings spiritually fulfilling.

Vaidika Sanghom is grateful to HH Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, whose prayers and blessings strengthened this mission; to HG Dr. Mathews Mar Thimothios, President of St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sanghom; and to Rev. Fr. Dr. Ninan V. George, General Secretary of the Vaidika Sanghom, for their visionary and dedicated leadership.

Third anniversary of the 'Sahodaharan' Project

"Empathizing with others in their distress and helping them are the values taught by Christ and Buddha", said Dr. CV Ananda Boss, honourable Governor of West Bengal. He was inaugurating the third anniversary of Sahodaran project, a notable Charity initiative of the Malankara Orthodox Church at Catholicate Aramana Devalokam. He pointed out that through this commendable project the Orthodox Church and His Holiness the Catholicos have taken the vision of Christ and Buddha to its fullness. The Governor congratulated the members of the St Mary's Women's League (Martha Mariam Samajam) for collecting Rupees One crore forty lakhs towards marriage assistance of poor girls through the project 'a gram of gold for our sister.' He said this is ample proof to say that nothing is impossible if women strive together.

The fundraising of Rupees One crore was carried out for extending monetary assistance of rupees one lakh each to hundred needy women. His Holiness the Catholicose said on the occasion that spirituality is based on brotherhood. When we do what we wish for ourselves to our less privileged brothers

that will lead to equality in society. The church and society should move in this direction, His Holiness added.

Major Kumar, ADC to the Governor, informed the meeting that the excellence award Instituted by the Governor is being conferred on the Malankara Orthodox Church in recognition of the involvement and cotributions the church makes in community welfare activities. Dr C.V. Ananda Bose handed over the award comprising a cheque for Rupees One lakh and a Special Citation to His Holiness the Catholicos. The cheque towards marriage assistance was received by V. Rev. John Sankarathil Cor-Episcopa on behalf of the beneficiaries. The Honourable Governor handed over the hundred bridal sarees collected by Ardhra Charitable Society under the scheme 'Manavattikku Oru Pudava' to Smt. Mary Varghese, Saint Mary's League secretary Mavelikkara diocese.

The 76th birthday of His Holiness was befittingly celebrated on the occasion. The Honourable Governor and Bava Thirumeni cut the birthday cake together.Dr. Ananda Bose also released the Souvenir of the Sahodaran Project. H. G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos, Secretary of the Holy Episcopal Synod, welcomed the gathering. V. Rev. Yakkob Ramban presented the Activities Report of Sahodharan project. Sri. Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan MLA and H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros offered felicitations. Adv. Biju Oommen, Malankara Association Secretary, proposed the vote of thanks. Priest Trustee Rev. Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil and Lay Trustee Sri. Ronny Varghese Abraham also graced the occasion.

A Historic Day for the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church in Europe

March 15, 2025 marked a significant milestone for the Diocese of UK, Europe, and Africa, as Holy Eucharist services were conducted in four regions of Europe. The Diocese organized and celebrated these services in Varna (Bulgaria), Lisbon (Portugal), Stockholm (Sweden) and Warsaw (Poland), expanding its spiritual presence across the continent, particularly to some uncharted regions.

This remarkable achievement was made possible through the dedication and efforts of the clergy and local organizers. The Diocese expresses its heartfelt gratitude to all the priests who conducted the Holy Eucharist (Fr Happy Jacob at Varna Bulgaria, Fr Mathew Abraham at Lisbon Portugal, Fr Jibin Thomas Abraham at Stockholm Sweden and Fr Abraham John at Warsaw Poland) and to the committed individuals who worked tirelessly to make these services a reality.

This expansion reflects the growing spiritual needs of the Malankara Orthodox faithful in Europe and reaffirms the Church's mission to reach and serve its members wherever they are.

Fr. Jacob Philip
Fifty Years of Priesthood

Fr. Jacob Philip is in his fiftieth year of Priesthood. Even though he is not interested in celebrations, he is fully engaged in Charity Works. He built four houses with his own money and donated all four to the needy. Besides this, he gives financial aid to seven students every year and scholarships to outstanding students. He helps sick people and also gives marriage aid to young couples. He visits orphanages and gives food to the inmates.

He was born in 1949 to Muthoor, Kanackattu K.C Philip and Annamma Philip (Annamma Sir). After post-graduation he went for theological education at Kottayam. He was ordained as Deacon in 1973 during his theological education, by Late Yuhanon Mar Severios, the then Bishop of Cochin Diocese. After obtaining his degree in theology, he was ordained as priest, in 1975, by His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews 1, at Parumala Seminary. During his tenure as priest, he served as the Vicar at Mannar, Pavukkara, St.Thomas Church, Eraviperoor, St. Thomas Church and later joined Delhi Diocese, where he served as Vicar in Jaipur, Kota, Ajmer and Ketri. In 1981 he was appointed as Vicar in the Diocese of America. During his thirty years of service in New York he served as Vicar in Brooklyn, Queens and New Jersey. While in the American Diocese, he had served as the Vice-President of the Martha Mariam Samajam for 16 years, during which, for the first time, the Samajam was able to publish a video about the “Faith and Practices” of the church. He worked as Diocesan Council Member and as Managing Committee Member, representing the American Diocese during 2007-2012. In 2007 he returned to India and is working in the educational field and in different areas of the Church. At present he is working as Committee Member of House Building Aid Committee of the Malankara Orthodox Church.

Wife : Aleyamma Jacob, from Pulikeezhu Alummoottil, Thiruvalla.
Children: Prince, Princy and Pincy
Daughter-in-law and sons-in-law: Salini, Jacob Zachariah, Joy Alex George
Grandchildren: Gregory, Benjamin, Moses, Amos.

Your Resurrection, Lord – made heaven and earth rejoice
Gladden Your Church
And preserve all her children – by Your Cross